Synopsis for Pre-submission Seminar

Research Topic

"TEMPLES AS CULTURAL SITES: CASE STUDIES FROM RADHA BENGAL (16^{th} – 19^{th} CENTURIES)"

Utpal Biswas
Research Scholar
Registration No.: R-17RS06120132
Date of Registration: 19-03-19
Department of History
Presidency University, Kolkata

Supervisor

Dr. Salim Zaweed

Assistant Professor, Dept. of History

Presidency University

Kolkata

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Introduction

"The great temples of India occupy a position of such outstanding importance in the cultural life of the world that even a lifetime of intensive study would hardly be sufficient for an adequate survey of the thousands of years of religious development which they represent."[1] The importance of the temples in society can be understood through this statement by Norman Edgley.

Across the diverse geopolitical regions of the Indian subcontinent, temple construction thrived, driven by socio-religious, political, and economic factors, fostering cultural prosperity. The south-eastern region, Bengal, was no exception to this trend. However, a notable surge in temple construction, embellishment, and active religious and cultural engagement on temple premises occurred between the 16th and 19th centuries in Bengal. During this period, when temple construction was dwindling elsewhere in India, these temples played a crucial role. This significance was aptly captured by the renowned British scholar George Michell: "Built between the sixteenth and nineteenth century the temples of Bengal form one of the most distinctive groups of sacred monuments in India".[2]

The study titled "***Temples as Cultural Sites: Case Studies from Radha Bengal (16th – 19th Centuries)***" delves into various aspects of society directly associated with Bengal's temples during this period. This study focuses on the significance and involvement of temples in different cultural aspects within a specific part of Bengal known as 'Rāḍha' Bengal, represent the entire Bengal. In exploring the temples of Bengal during the 16th to 19th centuries, an attempt is made to grasp the origins and robustness of the immensely rich Bengali culture. This study further delves into fields such as education, medicine, art, regional politics, and economy, all intricately linked with the temple institution.

Brief Review of Literature

To understand the architectural and cultural history of temples of Bengal, the journey begins with the pioneering work of J. D. Beglar (*Report of a Tour Through the Bengal Provinces of Patna, Gaya, Munger, and Bhagalpur, the Santal Parganas, Manbhum, Singhbhum, & Birbhum, Bankura, Raniganj, Burdwan, and Hughly in 1872-73*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1878), James Fergusson, (*History of*

Indian and Eastern Architecture, London: John Murry, 1910), Manmohan Chakravarti (Bengali Temples and their General Characteristics', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. V, 1909).

With this, there is a vast amount of literature on temple art, architecture and cultural history of Bengal. Among them, the pioneering scholar David J. McCutchion accomplished a significant and valuable work titled '*Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal*', (1972). In this seminal work, McCutchion systematically categorized Bengal's temple architecture, offering a detailed examination of the origin and developmental stages of each architectural group.[3] Amia Kumar Bandyopadhyay, published a book titled '*Bānkurār Mandir*' (1964). In his writings, Bandyopadhyay highlighted the significant influence of *Gouḍiya Vaishṅavism* in the construction of numerous temples in Bankura and other parts of Bengal and described the sequence of decorative motifs on temple walls. In this specific field a very important work has been edited by George Michell titled '*Brick Temples of Bengal: From the Archive of David McCutchion'* (1983). The book was a collaborative effort, incorporating writings from George Michael, David McCutchion, Tarapada Santra, and Zulekha Haque. Michell emphasized the crucial role of temples as cultural centres in society, asserting that Bengali temples are among the most significant manifestations of the region's culture.[4] In the same way, Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, Kolkata, published another edited volume, titled '*Paschimbonger Mondir-Terracotta*' (2009). This compilation featured contributions from prominent scholars, including David McCutchion, Amia Kumar Bandyopadhyay, Tarapada Santra, Hites Ranjan Sanyal, Binodbihari Mukhopadhyay, Zulekha Haque, and Mohit Ray. The articles comprehensively explored various aspects of temple architecture and decorative art throughout different historical periods.

Other important works are Panchanan Ray, *Bāṅglār Mandir* (1974), Bimal Kumar Dutta, *Bengal Temples* (1975), Pranab Ray, *Bāṅglār Mandir: Sthāpatya o Bhāskarya* (1999), Ajay Khare, *Temple Architecture of Eastern India* (2005), and Sreela Basu and Abhra Bose, *Bāṅglār Terracotta Mandir: Akhyān o Alangkaran* (2015).

Hites Ranjan Sanyal pursued a distinctive approach in his studies titled *Social Mobility in Bengal* (1981). In this writing, he delved into understanding the reasons behind the prolific construction of thousands of temples in Bengal from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Binoy Ghosh published '*Paschim Banger Sanskriti*' (1957) in three volumes, making the first attempt to discuss the cultural aspects of Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Purulia, Midnapore, Howrah,

Hooghly, Murshidabad, Nadia, and 24 Parganas based on significant historical temple sites. Pika Ghosh authored a distinctive book titled, '*Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal*' (2005). In this endeavour, Ghosh approached temple architecture with a keen emphasis on its practical and functional aspects.

This research is an attempt to trace the socio-religious and cultural condition of temples of Rāḍha Bengal between the 16th to 19th centuries. Here we must add that no work has hitherto traced the cultural scenario of the temples of Bengal during the study period.

Research Objectives

1. The first and foremost objectives of the research are to find out the causes behind thousands of temples that were built between the 16th to 19th centuries in Bengal and why Bengal's temples might not exhibit the same scale as their counterparts in other parts of the country, like Khajuraho and Orissa.
2. Secondly to highlight the socio-economic and political background of patrons of temples of Bengal and to explore the patron's motives behind temple construction.
3. The next objective is to identify the caste and social position of the artisan's community and their skill and temple construction methods.
4. An important objective is to explore political motives behind the temple construction and cultural activity of temples actively associated with the politics of that particular period in Bengal, especially the Mallas of Bishnupur, the Rājās of Burdwan, ruler of Pachet and their subordinate landholders.
5. The temple of the study period of Bengal has an important role in economic activity through fairs, festivals, offerings and land donations. Here we focused on to explore economic strength and activity of temple which influenced the local economies, trade networks, and the overall economic well-being of the regions where they were established.
6. Temples of Bengal were involved in different social activities viz, used as devotional worship hall, educational institutions, medical centers etc. Here, our focuses on to explore, what was the process and which temples were directly or indirectly involved in this kind of charitable work.

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study combines narrative and analytical approaches. It explores the intrinsic connection among humans, religion, and culture. Various

tools have been employed to delve into the past, encompassing archaeological remains, scrutiny of contemporary literature, analysis of archival data, field surveys, photography, and interviews with individuals associated with the research question from diverse perspectives. This research is categorized under both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Prior to initiating a circumstantial analysis of the specific research question, a meticulous literature review was conducted to carefully select significant temple sites. This process involved a thorough examination of first-hand sources such as contemporary literature and archival data, emphasizing a cautious and selective approach to reconstructing the cultural past.

Secondary sources, including numerous works by prominent authors, have been consulted to enhance the analysis of primary data. Extensive data collection efforts involved visits to various libraries, such as National Library of India, Library of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Centre for Archaeological Studies & Training, Eastern India Library (CASTE), Presidency University Library, Visva-Bharati Library, Bangiya Sahitya Parisad Library, Bishnupur Sahitya Parisad Library, Gramin Library of Mankar, Gramin Library of Nanoor, among others.

The research is significantly enriched by extensive field surveys, which are a cornerstone of this study. A total of 34 temple sites spanning across Rāḍha Bengal were meticulously selected for investigation. Each chosen site was visited multiple times, both during festive occasions and ordinary days. The field surveys proved instrumental in collecting unique source data and photographs, with a particular focus on art, architecture, building materials, inscriptions, and other architectural remnants directly or indirectly linked to the research.

Taking an ethno-archaeological perspective, conducting interviews with members of the founder's family, temple servants, priests, and elders from the local community yielded a wealth of relevant information. And, I conducted a thorough comparison and cross-referencing of archaeological data and literary sources.

A Short Note on Source

This research has used two types of sources i) Primary sources and ii) Secondary sources. Along with these two sources, oral sources have been used for shaping the research.

The primary sources are mainly dedicatory temple inscriptions, temple buildings, reports of the Archaeological Survey of India, Archaeological survey report of J. D. Beglar, E.

T. Dalton and T. Bloch, travel report of Tavernier, District Gazetteers of Hooghly, Howrah, Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura and Manbhum, *Jelār Purākirti*, Census Reports of 1951and 1961, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal (1835&1838*). Several contemporary texts also used ere viz., *Manasā-Maṅgal* of Bijay Gupta, *Chandi-Maṅgal, Dharma-Maṅgal* Mukundaram Chakravorti, *Annadā-Maṅgal* of Bharata Chandra, *Chaitanyamaṅgal* of Jayānanda, *Chaitanya Charitāmrita* of Krishṅadās Kavirāj, *Rāmāyāna, Mahābhārata* etc.

The secondary sources are mainly three categories i.e., books, articles and thesis. Among of the vast secondary sources, we mention here several books and articles which are very important shaping the research. Those are *Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal: Origins and Classification* (1972) by David J. McCutchion, *Brick Temples of Bengal: From the Archives of David McCutchion* (1983) edited by George Michell, *Bānkurār Mandir* (1964) by Amia Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Paschimbaṅger Mandir-Terracotta* (2009) by Bangiya Sahitya Parisad,, Tarapada Santra *Tārāpada Sāntra Rachanā Saṅgrah* (2020) edited by Shyamal Bera & Kishor Das, *Paschimbaṅger Sanaskriti*, Vol. I, II & III (1957) Binoy Ghosh, *A Corpus of Dedicatory Inscriptions from Temples of West Bengal (c.1500 A.D. to 1800 A.D.)* (1982) by A. K. Bhattacharyya, *Paschimbaṅger Pujā-Pārban o Melā*, Vol. I, II, III, IV & V (1974-1982) by Ashok Mitra, *Bāṅgāleer Itihās: Aadi Parba* (1949) by Nihar Ranjan Ray.

Details of Chapters

The research work titled "*Temple as Cultural Sites: Case Studies from Radha Bengal (16th - 19th Centuries)*" comprises six chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. Each chapter in the thesis is structured with a title and various subheadings to facilitate in-depth discussions on specific aspects of the chosen topic.

Chapter I

The first chapter titled "***Rāḍha Bengal: Geographical Settings and Historical Background***" is dedicated to outlining the study area's boundaries, known as Rāḍha Bengal. The chapter delves into the geographical features, climate, landscape, and inland, and water routes of the ancient and medieval eras, acknowledging their influence on human life. The latter part of the chapter shifts focusses to the political and economic landscape of Bengal, spanning from ancient times to the 19th century.

Through analysing several inscriptional records like Naihati copper plate of Vallala Sena (12th C. AD), Shaktipur copper plate of Laxman Sena (2nd half of 12th century), the

Bhubaneswar inscription of Bhattabhavadeva (12th C. AD), Tirumalai rock inscription of Rajendra Chola I and several literature like Jain text *Āchāraṅga Sutra* (3rd century BC), *Raghuvamsa* of Kālidāsa (4th C. AD), *Nyākandali* of Sridharacharya (8th -9th C. AD) *Kāvyamimāmsā* of Rājasekhara (9th-10th C. AD), *Prabodha Chandradaya* of Krishna Misra (11th Century) *Pavanaduta* of Dhoyin (13th C. AD), *Tabaqat-i-Nāsiri* of Minhaj-ud-Din, *Chandi-Maṅgal* of Mukundarām (16th century), *Shibāyan-Kāvya* of Rāmakrishṅa Ray (1635-40), *Dharma-Maṅgal* of Ghanaram (18th century) etc., the Rāḍha Bengal is a red soil land and located on the western side of river Ganga. Examining these sources and corroborating with the Rarhi dialect-speaking places, we define the location and boundaries of Rāḍha Bengal, which were extended from river Bhagirathi to Santal Pargana and from Kandi subdivision of Murshidabad district to the Rupnarayan river. It included the modern East and West Burdwan, Birbhum, the south-western part of Murshidabad, Bankura, Purulia, Hooghly, Howrah and a large part of West Medinipur.

Several historical routes (inland and water) connected Rāḍha with other regions, significantly impacting its economic, political, and cultural landscape. Medieval texts and travellers' accounts, such as *Kathāsaritsāgar* of Somadev Suri, travel account of Yijing and Xuan Zang, and Dudhpani inscription provide detailed routes linking Pataliputra, Varanasi, Vaishali, Bodhgaya, Rajgriha, Nalanda, Anga-Champa and Puri which took a very important role to shape the architectural activity and cultural life of Bengal.

The latter part of the chapter discusses how the *Gouḍia Vaishṅavism* and *Shaivism* deeply influenced the religious life of Bengal. With this, the secular political approach from the time Rājā Ganesha and his son Jadu helped to build the Hindu religious architecture. After the invention of Europeans in Bengal, the trading activity and the newly introduced zamindary system (Permanent Settlement, 1793) helped to formulate to build thousands of temple architecture during the 16th to 19th centuries.

Chapter II

The second chapter, titled "***Temples of Bengal: Art, Architecture, and Materials***", provides a brief exploration of temple art, architecture, and building materials.

In the early part of the chapter, we found that Bengal's temple architecture evolved into distinct styles: *deul* (traditional), *chālā*, *bāṅglā*, *ratna*, and *dālān*. The traditional or deul temples of Bengal were influenced by the *śikhara* temple architecture of Orissa and Bihar. The *bāṅglā* or hut type, also known as the *chālā* temple, is a quintessential form inspired by

traditional domestic huts. The *dālān* style, characterized by flat roofs, also made a significant impact on Bengal's temple architecture, initially influenced by Indo-Islamic designs and latter by European styles during the 19th century.

Interestingly the temples of Bengal were also influenced by the South Indian temple architecture. The Śiva temple at Ara (West Burdwan), classified by the Archaeological Survey of India as a *śikhara* or *rekha deul* temple, is notable for its divergence from traditional *śikhara* style and its resemblance to South Indian temples. The Sena dynasty, with ties to South India, likely brought Dravidian architectural knowledge to Bengal, influencing temples like the Ara Śiva temple.

Bengal's temples are adorned with motifs of *Shaiva*, *Shakta*, *Vaishṅava*, and secular themes, reflecting communal harmony. Floral designs, *Purānic* scenes, stories from the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, and social scenes frequently decorate these temples. Zulekha Haque noted that illiterate terracotta artists depicted scenes from these epics and *Purānas*, which were popularly spread through folk songs like *Maṅgal Kāvya*, *Pāṅchāli*, and *Krishṅa-yātrā*.[5] The temples of Bengal are also decorated with European figures. Temples like the Jo-Bāṅglā temple in Itanda and the Bholānāth temple in Sribati, temples in Moukhira, Illambazar, Surul, and the Laxmi Janārdhana temple in Ghurisha and Temples at Antpur feature depictions of European figure. The trading activity and the elite lifestyles of the Europeans were the main inspirations to artisans for depicting the European figure on the temple surface.

Primarily noted that the temples of Bengal are not large like Bhubaneshwar and Khajuraho because lack of good quality stone materials and huge wealth. Not only the lack of good quality materials but also the worshipping approach of the god and goddess of Bengali people also influenced the temple art and architecture. Bengali worshipers viewed their deities as approachable family members rather than distant figures. Goddess Durgā was imagined as a daughter visiting her paternal home yearly with her children. Writers like Kamalakanta Bhattacharya and Ramprasad Sen portrayed Durgā as the daughter of a humble rural father.[6] And Śiva as a lazy drag addicted poor husband of Durgā. Similarly, the goddess Laxmi was seen as a simple housewife. These perceptions led to the worship of deities in small, hut-like shrines with remarkable terracotta depictions.

Chapter III

The third chapter, entitled "***Temple Sites: Art, Architecture, Fair & Festivals***", extensively explores thirty-four significant temple sites within the study area, serving as

representative examples of Bengal's temples. Each temple site is meticulously detailed, providing explicit information on longitude and latitude, historical significance, and current conditions.

These temple sites are 1) Ambika-Kalna, 2) Burdwan, 3) Mankar, 4) Manteswar, 5) Moukhira, 6) Srikhanda, 7) Bankati, 8) Barakar, 9) Debipur/Kalyaneswari, 10) Gourangapur-Dhekur 11) Bakreshwar, 12) Ghurisa-Sripur, 13) Ganpur, 14) Jaydev-Kenduli, 15) Nanoor, 16) Surul, 17) Tarapith, 18) Bahulara, 19) Bishnupur, 20) Chhatna, 21) Indas, 22) Sonamukhi 23) Boram, 24) Pakbira, 25) Para, 26) Telkupi 27) Antpur, 28) Bansberia, 29) Guptipara, 30) Tarakeshwar 31) Garh Bhawanipur 32) Raspur 33) Chandrakona 34) Daspur.

This discussion about the temple sites places extensive emphasis on their geographical location and present condition, as well as their artistic and architectural characteristics, inscriptions, deities and associated cults, economic conditions, cultural activities, and the fairs and festivals they host. This wealth of information serves as the key to comprehending the socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary society as reflected in these temples.

Chapter IV

The fourth chapter, titled "***Temples and Patronage***", delves into the socio-economic and political backgrounds of temple patrons. Through a comprehensive analysis of temple inscriptions, and Annual Reports of ASI, the chapter aims to elucidate the socio-economic and political contexts of these patrons, categorizing them based on their professions. The latter part of the chapter explores the reasons behind the extensive construction of thousands of temples in Bengal during the study period.

In the context of Bengal, rulers and members of royal families in Rāḍha Bengal played a pivotal role in temple construction. Powerful *zamindārs* and feudatories, especially those in the state's frontier regions, achieved semi-independent status. These semi-independent rulers, such as the Mallas of Bishnupur, the *zamindār* rājās of Burdwan, the ruler of Pachet, Bansberia, Bhursut and their subordinate landholders were instrumental in the proliferation of temples. Besides the landed aristocracy, royal servants, *pundits*, traders, physicians, and even dacoits were heavily involved in temple construction in Bengal.

The patrons of Bengal's temples came from various castes and social backgrounds. The upper-caste Brahmins played a significant role in temple construction during the studied period. Royal benefactors like the Mallas of Bishnupur, the Rājās of Burdwan, and the ruler of Pachet

identified as Kshatriya, substantiated by their active involvement in temple construction across Bengal. The *Kayastha* community, initially categorized as upper-class *Sudras*, significantly contributed to temple construction. Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal argued that temple construction by lower-caste individuals served as a means to elevate their social status. Sanyal suggested that lower-class Sudra castes, specifically the *Tili* (*ajalachal*) community built temples to enter the *Navasākha* (*jalachal*) community thereby enhancing their social standing.[7] Interestingly, lower-caste *Sudras* like the *Suvarna Vanik* or gold merchants, who were financially affluent and constructed multiple temples, did not identify as upper-class *Sudras*.

Chapter V

The fifth chapter, titled "***The Artisans: Craftsmanship and Contributions***", provides a comprehensive exploration of temple artisans. Throughout this chapter, there is a continuous tracing of the habitation centres of artisans achieved through a meticulous analysis of dedicatory temple inscriptions discovered within the study area and beyond. Artisan communities were notably concentrated in districts like Bankura, East and West Burdwan, Birbhum, Howrah, Hooghly, and East and West Medinipur. Key artisan centres included Senhati, Daspur, Bishnupur, Sonamukhi, Suri, Dubrajpur, and Guskara. A survey by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museum of West Bengal documented 64 temples in Howrah district, 221 in Hooghly district, 702 in East and West Burdwan, and 293 in East and West Medinipur, indicating a significant workforce of skilled craftsmen engaged in these projects.[8]

Different terms found from temple inscription which proved the involvement of different group of temple artisans involved in temple construction. The terms *Kāminā* (worker), *Vevārti* (supervisor), *paricāraka* (supervisor), *kārigar* (craftsman), *mistri* (mason), *bhāskara* (sculptors), *lekhaka* (writers), and *silpin* (artists). Historically, artisans in Bengal were categorized under the *Sudra* caste. According to the *Brihaddharma Purāna*, *Kumbhakār* (potters) and *Chitrakār* (painters) were classified under the pure *Sudra* caste. Also the lower-class *Sudras*, like the *Bāgdi* and *Hāḍi* communities, participated in temple construction. The *Bāgdi* community of Bankura district is divided into nine sub-classes, with *Tentuliā* and *Kāsāikuliā* involved in artistic work.

Different social strata or '*thāks*' existed within the *Sutradhara* community and they were worked moving one place to another place. For instance, *Sutradharas* in the Bagari area of Medinipur district were divided into *Bardhamāna*, *Māndāran*, *Khāripetya*, and *Bhāskara thāks*. In the Burdwan district, *Sutradharas* explicitly denoted their professions: *Kāshthakāra*

(woodworkers), *Bhāskara* (stone carvers), *Chitrakāra* (painters), and *Mrittikāra* (clay workers).

The artisans of Bengal had the idea and knowledge of *Shilpasāstra.* The early temples of Bengal were constructed through flowing the Orissan architectural canons the *Shilpasāstra.* But those are destroyed by natural hazards. Although the artisans of Bengal transferred their knowledge and learned the temple construction process practically and orally. Maniklal Simha noted that in Bishnupur, artisans followed several *Shilpasāstras*, though these texts were eventually destroyed by pests.[9] Binay Ghosh recorded that King Chitrasen of Burshut donated extensive temple and Brahmin-owned lands to various temples. Among the land records, one included a drawing of a double-storied brick temple at Garh Bhawanipur, detailing the placement of deities within the temple.[10]

Chapter VI

The sixth and final chapter titled "*Cultural Aspects of Temple in Bengal*" is organized into seven sub-sections. It deals with the political, administration, economic, art, education, medical treatment, and legendary culture evolved with the temple.

Temple and Polity: During the study period, the kings of Gopabhum, Shikharabhum, Mallas of Bishnupur, Kings of Panchakot, *zamindār* of Bansberia, and the *zamindār* Rājās of Burdwan were actively engaged in temple construction. Their enthusiasm for religious architecture was underpinned by not only religious purposes but also political motives.

The rulers of the Shikhara dynasty very cleverly controlled their sovereignty in their territory through *Daṇda Chhātā Parab*. In this festival, one *chhātā* (umbrella) was worshipped in Vairavathān and another was offered on behalf of the Gajapati kings. Another festival is *Chhātā Parab*. In this festival, a *chhātā* is offered to Lord Indra on behalf of Rājā of Kashipur. The *daṇda* (*rājdaṇda*) and *chhātā* (umbrella) are the symbols of sovereignty.

The rulers of Bishnupur and Burdwan disseminated their religious and political ideologies through their respective family Goddesses, Mrinmayi Devi and Sarbamaṅgalā. During the *Mahā Ashṭami* of Durgā *pūjā*, a specific moment known as *khyān* was marked by animal sacrifices and the firing of royal artillery, producing a resounding noise. This sound served as a signal for subordinate *zamindārs,* landholders, court officials, and all residents within their domains to commence their *Mahā Ashṭami pūjā*.

The Rājās of Burdwan built temples and donated huge land in their peripheral area. The Rādhā Vinod temple of Jaydev Kenduli, Lalji temple at Chandrakona, Temples at Kalna are few examples. The Mallas of Bishnupur also took the same strategy and secure the border line of their territory. Interestingly, this strategic approach extended beyond Bengal, reaching as far as Orissa. Rājā Kirtichandra possibly erected a Bengali-style temple near the Mārkendeya tank in Puri, not solely for religious purposes, but also to foster a positive relationship with the Bhoi dynasty of Puri.

The concept of the 'Integrative Polity' model, as proposed by scholars B. D. Chattopadhyaya and Hermann Kulke in the context of early medieval state structures, finds relevance in this context. According to Chattopadhyaya and Kulke, peripheral elements and powers within a state typically sought to align with the central authority, integrating themselves into the core area. On the other hand, Herman Kulke focuses on diverse facets of cultural integration, introducing the term 'ritual polity' within religious discussions. B. D. Chattopadhyaya further said that ingredients of subregional identity were interrogated at the centre. Several individual regional temple architectures and their culture follow the prominent centre. In the field of Bengal, the temple architecture and culture of Bishnupur, Burdwan, and Panchakot were the centre of these regional temples.

Temple Administration: To sustain the daily operations, worship ceremonies, and various ritualistic activities within the temple premises, a multitude of employees were required to perform diverse tasks. Different individuals were appointed for the necessity of temples, including priests (*purohit*), choristers, musicians, dancers, florists (*māli*), cooks, sweepers, guards, and various other attendants.

The patrons, priests, attendants (*sebāyit*), and guards primarily served as administrative figures within the temples. Patrons held the highest authority, having the ability to appoint priests, *sebāyits*, guards, and other staff. The Rājās of Bishnupur, along with their family members, served as *sebāyits* in the temples of Bishnupur and the neighbouring regions. The temples were became the huge employment centres in Bengal and the temple were became the independent administrative authority.

Temple and Economy: Patrons were responsible for overseeing daily worship, organizing special fairs and festivals, ensuring regular payment of salaries to temple staff, and managing various temple-related tasks. Fulfilling these duties demanded substantial wealth, *devattor* land, *pranāmi* and taxes from fairs and festivals were the income source of temples.

Hesel Riz noted that the Rājās of Bishnupur constructed 453 temples and allocated vast land holdings for their upkeep. The Rādhā-Vinod temple of Jaydeb Kenduli had 365 *bighās* tax-free land. The subordinate landlords under Bishnupur and Burdwan Rāj also contributed by donating land to temples. However, their circumstances changed drastically after 1757. Historian N. K. Sinha noted that between 1760 and 1770, many *zamindārs* fell into poverty.[11]

In the years 1763-64, approximately 568,736 *bighās* of tax-free land were assessed in the Burdwan district. Between 1765 and 1788, the newly appointed British Superintendents revoked this tax exemption, converting the land into rent-paying plots. By 1876, the number of tax-free landholders had significantly risen, increasing from 408 to 170,240 individuals within a century. Through this huge land donation, the subordinate landholders of Bengal saved their land and income from the British.

Pranāmi served as a significant income source not just for the temples but also for the patrons. Interestingly, even the British East India Company displayed a keen interest in collecting temple taxes. Adams reported in his account about the Baidyanāth temple at Deoghar. The temple collected huge offerings of money and jewels from the devotees. Mr. Keating, collectorate of Birbhum improved offering wealth from ₹ 430 (pound sterling) to ₹ 900 in 1790.[12]

Nearly every patron or trustee board associated with well-known temples or temple sites arranged fairs (*melā*) and festivals. These events not only celebrated the temple and its cultural significance but also served as one of the primary revenue streams. Additionally, these fairs and festivals acted as seasonal trade hubs for the local community, fostering the growth of the regional handicraft industry.

Temple and Performing Art: During the medieval period, temples served as vital hubs of folk culture in society. Furthermore, various cultural activities such as dance, song, *kirtan* (devotional songs), *kabigān* (poetry recitation), *yātrā* (religious processions), drama, and theatre were deeply intertwined with the religious context, often finding their stages and expressions within the precincts of temples.

The story of *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata*, *Purānas*, *maṅgal-kāvya* and other *Vaishṅva* and *Shakta* religious texts were well known and very popular among the people. The artisans make the stories visualize on the temple surface. Temples were the only medium to visualized the epic-*Purāna* culture.

In the temple premises of Bishnupur especially Rādhā-Vinod, Shyāma-Rāi, and Madanagopāl held evening song and *kirtan*. According to *Shilpasāstra*, this ritualistic performance must be performed on a separate platform in front of the temple called *nāta-mandapa*. The Lālji and Gopālji temples in Kalna, Ānandamayi Kāli at Mankar are a few examples, which have located pillared *nāta-mandapa.* But other large numbers of temples are not located in the *nāta-mandapa.* For those temples, the program was performed on open temple premises.

Temple and Education: Temples played a significant role in the field of education, providing a tangible testament to the endurance of the Sanskrit language over thousands of years.

In the education report of Birbhum, Adam mentioned that the family temple of the principal family of the village, especially *Chandi-Mandap* used as a school building. He also mentioned that, in Birbhum district, the temple constructed for *Yama,* locally called Dharmarāj temple frequently used as a school. In the year of 1817, Marshman mentioned that the Srirampur area of Hooghly district had no school building, but the people of this area offered their house and family temple for the school room. The Hooghly District Gazetteer mentioned that Bansberia was located at 12 to 14 *tols*. Rameshwar Ray of Bansberia brought several Brahmin families and established several *tols* and Sanskrit *pāthasālā*. It is also mentioned that the two *tols* of Tarakeshwar were mentioned by Mahantas of the Tarakeshwar temple. At Mankar, in the Burdwan district, the Durgā *dalan* complex (early 18th century) of Bara-Bāri was used as an educational centre (*tol*), run by the great pundit Raghunath Tarkalankar.

Temple and Medical Treatment: In ancient times, the understanding of diseases and their treatments was intertwined with both human and animal bodies. In the era of *Rigveda*, the twin gods Asvins were revered as physicians and diseases were often attributed to gods or supernatural forces.

A large number of manuscripts on the Ayurvedic medicine system have been discovered and collected from different villages of the Bankura district by Bangiya Sahitya Parisad of Bishnupur. Although, a medieval text the *Manasā-Maṅgal* mentioned that, the great physician Dhanvantari was made a treatment centre and he had hundreds of pupils. Here also mentioned that even the great physician was not able to cure the disease without blessings of the god.

W. W. Hunter described the native medicines and treatment system of Bengal, in his *Statistical Account of Rural Bengal*. According to him Dr. French, the Civil Surgeon reported that the native doctor known as *kabirāj*, was not learnt from the European institution and listed 69 indigenous vegetable drugs used by the *kabirāj*. The Kabirāj family of Mankar constructed a building named Bālā Khānā adjacent to the Durgā *dālān* complex, which was used for medical treatments. The Kabirāj family of Dakshin Khanda built Dakshina Kāli temple and practised medical treatment on temple premises, also the Bānkurā Rāy at Indas, the Garhchandi temple in Raspur of Howrah district, played a role in offering medicinal remedies to barren women, assisting them in their efforts to conceive children. The District Gazetteer of Hooghly noted that in Tarakeshwar, there was a small dispensary managed by the *Mahāntas*, or temple priests, who provided medical care to the community.

Temple and Legends: Legends play a significant role in shaping the cultural tapestry of temples in Bengal, often portraying gods or goddesses appearing physically or in dreams to patrons and devotees, instructing them to construct temples in their honour.

The very famous legend of 'conch bangles worn by goddess Chandi' is associated with several temples such as Kalyaneśwari temple at Debipur, Jugaddya temple at Khiragram etc., interestingly it is linked to the upper caste individuals such as rulers and Brahmin priests. And the legendary story of conch bangles, which originated in the text *Chaṇḍi-Maṅgal*. Another legendary story is about milk accumulating on a stone by a cow associated with the Śiva temple. The temple of Tarakeshwar and several temples of Gopabhuma are associated with this legend. Among the legendary stories, the dream legend is the most popular. The patron or the priest got a dream from the god and goddess to build a temple and arrange worship.

These narratives serve as a faithful means of drawing in both common people and patrons, rapidly increasing the temple's population. Even in the present day, legendary temples such as Mrinmayi Devi temple, Kalyaneśwari temple, Bānkurā Rāy temple, Tarapith, Bishālaxmi and Tarakeshwar temple continue to enjoy immense popularity. Without such legendary narratives, the temples may not have sustained themselves over an extended period.

Conclusion

Now, in the end, we discussed the importance of temples in the society of Bengal during the 16th to 19th century, which is briefly discussed in these six chapters. The patrons of Bengal came from every professional group, including rulers, landholders, priests, pundits, servants, traders, physicians, and even dacoits. Several artisan groups were deeply involved in

constructing temples and glorifying the cultural scenario of Bengal. Although our research concentrated on Rāḍha Bengal, it represented the scenario of the whole of Bengal. All The people of the Hindu society were directly or indirectly connected with temples during the study period. Temples of Bengal took a very important role in every field of human life, such as art and architectural industry, politics, economy, medicine, education and above all, religious beliefs, which was credible to live the right way in daily life.

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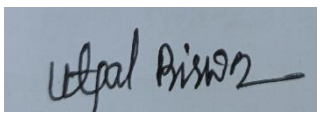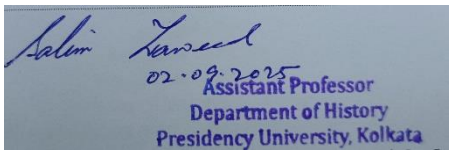
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